



Pacific Bluefin Tuna Management Update



Sportfishing Regulations for Bluefin Tuna Will Be Changing in 2015

Overview

NOAA Fisheries declared Pacific bluefin tuna to be an overfished stock in 2013. Based on the recommendation from the Pacific Fishery Management Council, NOAA Fisheries and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) are proposing federal and state regulations to: 1) reduce the bag limit for sport caught bluefin tuna taken in state and federal waters from ten fish per day to two fish per day; and 2) establish new at-sea fillet requirements for tuna on board or brought ashore south of Point Conception, California.

NOAA Fisheries will open the proposed federal regulations to public comment in March 2015, and will finalize the regulations after reviewing comments. The regulations are expected to reduce recreational take of bluefin tuna by 30 percent and aid in rebuilding the bluefin tuna population. The following is a list of frequently asked questions and answers associated with the Council's recommendation and the proposed regulations.

Possession and Bag Limits Questions & Answers

How many bluefin tuna can an angler possess on multi-day trips under the proposed changes?

If you are on a multi-day fishing trip and have a Declaration for Multi-day Fishing Trip on file with CDFW, you may possess up to three daily limits (six bluefin tuna) under the proposed regulations. Proper documents must be filed with CDFW before the trip begins. For more information about multi-day fishing trips, see CCR T-14, Section 27.15 on page 28 of the 2015-2016 Ocean Sport Fishing Regulations booklet:
<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/marine/oceansportregs.asp>.

What rules apply if I fish in Mexico and return to California?

The U.S. daily bag and multi-day possession limits being proposed may or may not be more conservative than Mexico's limits. While the proposed U.S. limits would not apply to U.S. anglers while fishing in Mexican waters, they would apply when U.S. anglers return to U.S. waters or U.S. ports with bluefin tuna on board, even in instances when all of the fishing during the trip took place in Mexico's waters. U.S. law enforcement personnel will enforce the U.S. limit in U.S. waters and ports regardless of where the fish were taken.

Why did Mexico close its fishery to U.S. fishermen in July 2014?

The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) manages tuna fisheries in the eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO) on an international scale. The IATTC placed limits on the amount of bluefin tuna that commercial fisheries operating in the EPO could catch in 2014. When commercial catches in the EPO neared that limit, the Mexican government closed fishing for bluefin in their waters so as to not exceed the established limit. Mexico's fishing closure regulation did not differentiate between commercial and recreational fishing. As a result, fishing by all gear types, including sportfishing, was prohibited. It is still unclear whether Mexico will again close bluefin fishing by all gear types in 2015 if and when the commercial EPO limit adopted by the IATTC is reached.

Fillet Requirement Questions & Answers

Why are additional requirements proposed for filleting tuna?

The proposed at-sea fillet requirements will assist law enforcement personnel in accurately differentiating among species of tuna, specifically yellowfin and bluefin.

Are there exceptions to the proposed fillet rules?

This proposed rule would only apply when filleting tuna species south of Point Conception. If you do not fillet your catch, you may leave the fish whole. Additionally, you could process them in another manner that leaves

the fish in a condition such that the species may be determined. This could include gilling and gutting, where the fish is bled and the gills and/or internal organs are removed, but the rest of the fish remains intact.

Pacific Bluefin Population Status Questions & Answers

What is the status of bluefin tuna population?

The spawning biomass of bluefin tunas is at historic lows (about 4% compared to the biomass if no fishing had taken place). The amount and rate of all sizes and ages of bluefin harvested each year continues to be too high. As a result, the population is considered to be overfished and subject to overfishing http://isc.ac.affrc.go.jp/pdf/Stock_assessment/PBF_2014_Exec_Summary_4-28-2014_gtd.pdf. An international rebuilding effort is underway to reduce fishing impacts, bring the stock back to healthy levels, and ensure the sustainability of future harvests. These proposed regulatory measures are part of the rebuilding effort.

How is the status of the bluefin tuna population determined?

NOAA Fisheries scientists work together with international scientists through an organization called the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC; see below) to review and analyze the best available data to assess the status of the population. Using data from commercial and recreational fisheries across the Pacific as well as on-the-water scientific observations, stock assessments describe the past and current status of the population. Additionally, the stock assessment process can include predictions about the performance of current and future management measures in rebuilding the stock. Established in 1995, the goals of the ISC include: (1) to enhance scientific research and cooperation for conservation and rational utilization of the species of tuna and tuna-like fishes that inhabit the North Pacific Ocean; and (2) to establish the scientific groundwork for the conservation and rational utilization of these species in this region. ISC's voting member nations are Canada, Chinese Taipei, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, the People's Republic of China and the U.S.A.

If there are so few bluefin, why are California fishermen seeing so many?

Of the tunas, Pacific bluefin has the broadest geographic range, spanning large expanses of the Pacific Ocean. They spawn in the western Pacific Ocean between central Japan and the northern Philippines, and in the Sea of Japan from April through August. A portion of these fish migrate to waters off the U.S. West Coast and Mexico. The exact proportion that migrates is unknown, but it is possible that in the last few years a larger proportion of the juveniles migrated from the spawning grounds to the West Coast and Mexico. The migration patterns of Pacific bluefin tuna are influenced by oceanographic conditions and vary among years. Increases in the number of fish observed locally may be a result of changes in the proportion of fish migrating to the eastern Pacific, and/or conditions along the west coast that may have shifted schools further north.

How do I comment on the proposed state regulations?

Written comments on the California Fish and Game Commission's (FGC) proposed state regulations (www.fgc.ca.gov/regulations/2015/index.aspx#27_65) that will conform with the federal rules may be submitted to the FGC by e-mail to FGC@fgc.ca.gov.

Questions about the proposed state regulations may be directed to:

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562-342-7169

How do I comment on the proposed federal regulations?

Comments on the proposed federal regulations will be accepted after the regulations publish in the Federal Register later this month. Please check out the proposed rule for the different ways you can submit comments. In the meantime, questions may be directed to:

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